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Activities of the United Nations Office for West Africa and the Sahel

Report of the Secretary-General

I. Introduction

1. The present report covers the period from 1 July to 31 December 2018 and provides an overview of developments and trends in West Africa and the Sahel. It also outlines the activities of the United Nations Office for West Africa and the Sahel (UNOWAS) and progress made in the implementation of the United Nations integrated strategy for the Sahel. In addition, it provides an update on the situation in the Lake Chad basin, pursuant to Security Council resolution 2349 (2017).

II. Developments and trends in West Africa and the Sahel

2. Since my last report (S/2018/649), the political situation in West Africa and the Sahel has remained stable despite significant security challenges, in particular in Burkina Faso, the Niger and Nigeria, with an increase in the cross-border activities of terrorist groups and a retreat of State authorities from peripheral zones where populations continue to live precariously. Countries of the subregion have been working together to address the complex political, security and development challenges at the root of the growing insecurity.

3. During the reporting period, a presidential election was held in Mali, regional and parliamentary elections in Mauritania and local elections in Côte d'Ivoire. The next cycle of electoral processes is causing simmering tensions across the region.

A. Political and governance trends

4. In Burkina Faso, on 30 July, the National Assembly approved the reform of the electoral code, thus paving the way for the Congres pour la democratie et le progres of former President Blaise Compaore to participate in the 2020 presidential election. The new electoral code also guarantees the right of the diaspora to vote for the first time, which would add an estimated 2.5 million potential voters to the 5.5 million existing voters.

5. In Côte d'Ivoire, on 16 July, a new political party, Rassemblement des houphouetistes pour la democratie et la paix, was established from the merger of

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several parties in the ruling coalition, and President Alassane Ouattara was appointed as its leader. On 9 August, the Parti democratique de Côte d'Ivoire opted out of the unified party, thus ending its alliance with the ruling Rassemblement des republicains. On 13 October, regional and municipal elections took place in a largely peaceful environment, despite isolated acts of violence resulting in the death of five people. The ruling coalition secured control of 117 of 201 municipalities and 19 of 31 regional councils. In the meantime, the opposition continued to call for the reform of the Independent Electoral Commission.

6. In the Gambia, efforts towards national reconciliation continued while the Government continued to be confronted by internal divisions. Disputes over land tenure and worker strikes in various public sectors heightened tensions. The cabinet reshuffle of 29 June left only the United Democratic Party and the National Reconciliation Party in the Government, effectively further splintering the ruling coalition.

7. In Guinea, political tensions persisted owing to disagreements between the Government and the opposition over the results of the local elections of 4 February. Delays and opposition concerns regarding the installation of 342 newly-elected municipal councils led to public demonstrations, many of which turned violent. Political tensions were compounded by increasing social unrest, notably a nation-wide strike by teachers launched on 3 October, and by the controversial removal of the President of the Constitutional Court following a motion of no confidence against him by the Court for alleged mismanagement. The removal was denounced by opposition leaders as being politically motivated. On 23 October, the vehicle of opposition leader Cellou Dalein Diallo was damaged by a projectile, leaving him unharmed, but injuring his driver.

8. The political and security situation in Liberia remained stable despite governance challenges. Controversy over the alleged disappearance of 16 billion Liberian dollars (approximately $102 million) and the launch by the Legislature of an impeachment process against Supreme Court Associate Justice Kabineh Ja'neh on allegations of misconduct, abuse of power and corruption, took centre stage in the national debate. Investigations into the allegedly missing money were launched, and peaceful demonstrations took place, while the impeachment proceedings created tensions between the Legislature and the Supreme Court.

9. Local, regional and legislative elections took place on 1 September in Mauritania. The peaceful polls were dominated by the ruling Union pour la Republique, which secured 89 of 157 seats in the National Assembly, along with all regional councils and a majority of seats in local councils. Following the elections, President Mohamed Ould Abdel Aziz announced the formation of a new Cabinet. On 29 October, the second largest opposition group, El Wiam, announced its merger with Union pour la Republique, and its leader was elected as vice-president of the National Assembly. During the reporting period, several high-ranking officials publicly called for the President to seek a third mandate. The President repeatedly denied that he would seek a third mandate, despite the opposition accusing him of the contrary.

10. In the Niger, after almost two years of political impasse, the opposition agreed to participate in a joint technical committee, tasked with the revision of the electoral code and the re-activation of the Cadre national de dialogue politique. The 2021 presidential election dominated the political scene. President Mahamadou Issoufou stated on several occasions that he would be stepping down at the end of his mandate.

11. In Nigeria, tensions have been rising ahead of the presidential and parliamentary elections of 16 February 2019, and of the gubernatorial and state assembly elections of 2 March 2019. Concerns were raised by the reported instrumentalization of security forces in recent gubernatorial elections, the surge in alleged vote buying and the

challenges related to the ability of internally displaced persons to participate in the polls amid ongoing terrorism and violence between farmers and herders. Following the announcement in July of a split in the ruling All Progressives Congress, there have been a series of high-profile defections to the opposition People's Democratic Party.

12. In Senegal, preparations continued for the presidential election of 24 February 2019, with increasing tensions between the opposition and the Government. On 30 August 2018, an appeal court upheld the five-year jail term of a potential presidential contender, Khalifa Sall. One day later, a presidential decree relieved him of his duties as mayor of Dakar. Also, on 30 August, the Supreme Court dismissed the request for Karim Wade, the son of former President Abdoulaye Wade, to be included in the voter register, which is a prerequisite for presidential candidates.

13. In Sierra Leone, since the inauguration of President Julius Maada Bio on 12 May, the political situation has been marked by increasing distrust between his Government and the partisans of former President Ernest Bai Koroma. On 26 June, the President suspended the boards of several parastatal enterprises and independent commissions, including the Human Rights Commission, provoking national and international criticism. On 4 July, a governance transition team, established by the President in April to conduct a stock-taking exercise of the state of affairs in various ministries, departments and agencies, submitted its report to the Government. The report contained several allegations of corruption against high-ranking officials of the previous administration, prompting accusations by the opposition and some civil society organizations of witch-hunting.

14. The inter-Togolese dialogue process continued under the auspices of the co-facilitators of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), President Nana Addo Dankwa Akufo-Addo of Ghana and President Alpha Conde of Guinea. Despite concessions made by the Government of Togo and by a coalition of 14 opposition parties, limited progress has been achieved, owing to persisting disagreements over the modalities for implementing the ECOWAS road map of 14 April. During the reporting period, the ECOWAS facilitators held meetings with the Togolese stakeholders in Accra, Conakry and Lomé to assess progress and attempt to move the process forward. While both sides reaffirmed their commitment to the road map, the Government also continued to display its determination to hold a referendum on constitutional reforms, as well as local and legislative elections before the end of 2018. The opposition parties maintained their demands for the adoption of electoral reforms before the elections, boycotted preparations for the elections and, subsequently, indicated that they would not take part in the polls. The opposition parties also continued street demonstrations against what they termed one-sided reforms.

B. Security trends

15. The security situation remained volatile in Burkina Faso, Mali, the Niger and Nigeria, with repeated attacks against civilians and the military by armed non-State actors, including terrorist groups, criminal networks and community-based militia. Burkina Faso faced increased attacks by extremist groups in the east and south of the country, heightening security risks for neighbouring countries, including Benin, the Niger, and, potentially, Togo. There has also been an upswing in intercommunal violence, in particular in the Niger along its western border with Mali. Despite increased military operations, attacks by herdsmen and bandits continued to exacerbate insecurity in Nigeria against the backdrop of several large-scale attacks launched by Boko Haram on Nigerian military positions. Terrorist groups operating in the Sahel appeared to be enhancing coordination, with patterns of attacks indicating a division of labour and close cooperation among groups.

16. In Burkina Faso, 125 security incidents were registered from 1 July to 15 September, approximately double the number of incidents registered throughout the whole of 2017. Terrorist attacks resulted in more than 65 civilian and military casualties in eastern Burkina Faso over the reporting period, compared with only 4 for the whole of 2017, and involved increasingly sophisticated operations. In the face of rising insecurity, the Government conducted military operations in Loroum, Oudalan and Soum Provinces.

17. In the Niger, defence and security forces faced continuous challenges in the west and south of the country. In south-eastern Niger, Boko Haram and Islamic State West Africa Province increased raids from across the border. There has also been a rise in kidnapping for ransom since the previous reporting period. In western Niger, militants of Islamic State in the Greater Sahara continued to use the regions of Tillaberi and Tahoua as a rear base for their operations in Burkina Faso and Mali. This resulted in isolated clashes with security forces and violence against civilians. In northern and eastern Niger, violent criminal incidents, including highway banditry and vehicle hijackings, continued.

18. In Nigeria, the operational tactics of Boko Haram appeared to be changing from targeting places of education, worship, government installations and markets, to direct attacks on military targets. An attack on a military convoy in Bama during the first week of July reportedly resulted in the death of 10 soldiers, the disappearance of 23 others and the loss of military equipment. On 15 July, heavily armed Boko Haram combatants overran the Eighty-first Division Forward Brigade in Jilli (Yobe State) killing at least 48 soldiers. On 1 September, Boko Haram killed 30 soldiers and raided the village of Zari in the north of Borno State.

19. During the reporting period, conflicts between farmers and herders resulted in loss of life, destruction of livelihoods and property, population displacements and human rights violations and abuses. Flashpoints included the cross-border axes between Burkina Faso, Mali and the Niger, which are the main countries of origin for livestock trade. Outbreaks of violence were recorded in many States across Nigeria, albeit with more frequency in the Middle Belt region, as well as Adamawa and Taraba States in the north-east. The spike in conflict between farmers and herders is closely linked with demographic pressures; desertification and the attendant loss of grazing reserves and transhumance routes, which has been exacerbated by climate change; challenges in the implementation of effective land management and climate change adaptation policies; limited enforcement of existing pastoral laws; political and economic interests; the erosion of traditional conflict resolution mechanisms; and weapons proliferation.

20. During a joint summit of the Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS) and ECOWAS, held on 30 July in Lomé, Heads of State and Government expressed concern about the upsurge in and spread of violent conflict between herders and farmers due particularly to the adverse effects of climate change. They requested the ministers responsible for agriculture, livestock and security of the two regions to hold regular consultations, with the participation of herder and farmer organizations, in order to identify measures for the prevention and peaceful management of those conflicts.

21. Maritime crime and piracy off the coast of West Africa continued to pose a threat to peace, security and development in the region. Oil-related crimes resulted in the loss of nearly $2.8 billion in revenues last year in Nigeria, according to government figures. Between 1 January and 23 November, there were 82 reported incidents of maritime crime and piracy in the Gulf of Guinea.

22. Compared to the situation reflected in the previous report, there was an increase in drug trafficking throughout West Africa and the Sahel. In Benin, the Gambia and

Nigeria, more than 50 kg of cocaine were seized between July and October by joint airport interdiction task forces. During the same period, joint airport interdiction task forces seized more than 6 kg of methamphetamines, 8 kg of heroin (double the amount in the first half of 2018) and 2.6 tons of cannabis. Drug production across the region was also reportedly on the rise, with more than 100 kg of ephedrine and phenacetin seized by competent authorities.

C. Socioeconomic trends

23. The region's economic growth is projected to reach 2.9 per cent in 2019, notably owing to forecast growth of 2.1 per cent in Nigeria, accounting for 75 per cent of the region's global economic output. Côte d'Ivoire is forecast to grow by 7.6 per cent, while Ghana is expected to continue to keep its status as the fastest growing economy in West Africa, with 8.6 per cent expected growth. Levels of public debt continued to increase, with several countries at a debt-to-gross domestic product ratio of 69.8 per cent, above the 50 per cent ceiling recommended by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank.

24. The Central Bank of West African States forecast an economic rebound in West Africa for 2019, except in the services and building and construction sectors. In the medium term, without a change in policies and with a favourable external environment, growth should reach 4 per cent. Challenges to the realization of the Sustainable Development Goals in West Africa and the Sahel include a low level of domestic and external investment compared to other regions, continuing impediments to domestic revenue mobilization, along with the need to improve the efficiency of public spending, trade and financial integration. Furthermore, regional economic integration, including through the free movement of persons, goods and services, has been hindered by security concerns.

D. Humanitarian trends

25. The humanitarian situation in West Africa and the Sahel remains worrying, mainly owing to food insecurity and forced displacements, and is aggravated by cyclical epidemics and vulnerability to external shocks. Around 24 million people in the region require humanitarian assistance. In Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, Mauritania, the Niger and Senegal, drought due to poor rains in 2017 decimated crops and caused acute water and pasture deficits in 2018. Food insecurity and malnutrition levels in the Sahel reached levels unseen since the food security crisis of 2012. More than 5.8 million people were in urgent need of food assistance at the peak of the lean season in July and August, and 2.1 million children still faced severe acute malnutrition as of November 2018. Humanitarian partners stepped up their response beginning in late 2017, assisting nearly half of those 5.8 million people. The World Food Programme reached 2.5 million people per month at the peak of the lean season. Favourable rains in many parts of the region since late July 2018 are expected to improve harvests and pasture. However, communities affected by the 2017 drought, having depleted their food reserves and suffered widespread livestock losses, will require sustained assistance to rebuild their livelihoods.

26. In the Lake Chad basin, insecurity and poor living conditions continued to spark population displacements. As of October, over 2.4 million people were internally displaced, up from 2.3 million in the same period in 2017, and over 230,660 Nigerian refugees were being hosted in Cameroon, Chad and the Niger. The number of those affected by food insecurity in the Lake Chad basin has risen by 1 million since the

first half of 2018, with food insecurity currently impacting a total of 5 million people, 3 million of whom are in north-east Nigeria alone.

27. A cholera epidemic in the Lake Chad basin, the worst since 2010, is declining thanks to stepped-up prevention and response efforts by communities, Governments and humanitarian partners. In Nigeria, new suspected cholera cases dropped to 742 per week in early October 2018 from nearly 3,000 cases per week in mid-September. The Niger reported 20 new cases a week in the same period, down from more than 400 cases weekly between August and September.

28. Aid organizations in the Lake Chad region delivered assistance to over 6 million people in 2018, despite many hurdles, including insecurity. Around 3,000 humanitarian workers are active in north-east Nigeria, where armed violence continues to inflict great human suffering and undermine aid operations. On 15 October, in north-east Nigeria, Islamic State West Africa Province executed a midwife working for the International Committee of the Red Cross.

29. For 2018, humanitarian organizations had requested $1.6 billion to assist conflict-affected people in the Lake Chad basin. As at 22 October, donors had provided only 46 per cent of that amount.

Human rights trends

30. The overall human rights situation in West Africa and the Sahel remains concerning. Terrorist groups continued to violate international humanitarian and human rights law, with a negative impact on the safety and security of communities. The increasing scope and intensity of clashes between farmers and herders, as well as intercommunal violence, banditry and cattle rustling, undermined the rights to life, physical integrity and property of indigenous communities, as well as the right to judicial remedy, as perpetrators continued to act with impunity.

31. During the reporting period, local and international human rights groups raised concerns over the arrest, detention and conviction of human rights defenders in some countries in the region, including Burkina Faso, Mauritania and the Niger. There are concerns that the instrumentalization of the justice system constitutes a stumbling block to the strengthening of democratic institutions. In a positive development, three prominent Nigerien civil society actors were released after four months in detention. However, in Mauritania, a leader of the anti-slavery movement, Biram Dah Abeid, under arrest since 7 August 2018 and charged with incitement to violence, remained in detention. Although he won a seat in parliamentary elections, he has been unable to take up his seat.

32. Some progress was made in terms of national reconciliation. In the Gambia, the authorities launched the Truth, Reconciliation and Reparations Commission, following nationwide consultations on transitional justice supported by the Peacebuilding Fund. In Burkina Faso, the Haut Conseil pour la réconciliation et l'unité nationale organized meetings throughout the country to raise awareness among and consult the population on the reconciliation process, also with funding from the Peacebuilding Fund. In Liberia, there has been limited progress in the implementation of the recommendations of its Truth and Reconciliation Commission.

33. Allegations of infringements on the freedoms of assembly and expression were made by opposition, civil society, trade union and other groups in several countries, including Benin, Côte d'Ivoire, the Gambia, Guinea, Nigeria, Mauritania and Senegal. Clashes between protestors and security forces resulted in injuries and loss of life, amid concerns over the disproportionate use of force in the maintenance of law and order. In Guinea, repeated demonstrations during the reporting period resulted in several casualties. In the Gambia, two people were killed and several were

injured by the police during the violent dispersal of protesters on 28 June. In Nigeria, members of Islamic Movement in Nigeria and security forces clashed in Abuja on 27 and 29 October. According to human rights groups, at least 45 members of Islamic Movement in Nigeria were killed by Nigerian security forces (who claimed that six people had died) while another 122 sustained gunshot wounds. Security forces also reportedly arrested hundreds of Islamic Movement in Nigeria protesters.

E. Gender issues

34. During the reporting period, the representation of women in senior positions across the region remained low despite some progress. Two women were elected mayor in Banjul and Dakar, while 5 of the 11 members of the Truth, Reconciliation and Reparations Commission in the Gambia were women. In Mauritania, following a government reshuffle on 30 October, 7 women were among the 23 government ministers who were appointed. Countries and regional organizations continued their efforts to implement Security Council resolution 1325 (2000).

35. Women's rights have been systematically violated by terrorist groups, such as Ansar al-Islam in parts of northern Burkina Faso, the Group for the Support of Islam and Muslims in western Niger, and Boko Haram in north-east Nigeria. Reports indicate that women faced abduction, arbitrary detention, restriction on their movements, various forms of corporal punishment and sexual violence.

III. Activities of the United Nations Office for West Africa and the Sahel

A. Good offices and special assignments of my Special Representative

36. My Special Representative for West Africa and the Sahel continued to support efforts to sustain peace in the region, in collaboration with regional and international partners, by promoting and supporting inclusive national dialogues, human rights, constitutional and institutional reforms, as well as transparent, credible and peaceful elections.

37. My Special Representative visited Conakry from 8 to 10 July, where he held discussions with representatives of the Government and the opposition. He encouraged stakeholders to accelerate the implementation of the political agreement of 12 October 2016 and to seek consensual solutions to reform the Electoral Commission.

38. In his capacity as my High-level Representative for Nigeria, my Special Representative continued consultations with key national stakeholders to promote an environment conducive to peaceful general elections in 2019.

39. My Special Representative initiated and participated in a joint pre-electoral mission to Nigeria with ECOWAS and the African Union from 29 to 31 October. During the mission, he consulted with the President, the Office of the Inspector-General, senior military officials, civil society organizations and other key actors and institutions.

40. My Special Representative visited Liberia from 7 to 10 November to take stock of the progress made since the closure of the United Nations Mission in Liberia. He encouraged national authorities and civil society to work together to strengthen governance, including of the security sector.

41. On 4 December, while in Cotonou to deliver an introductory speech at the Parliamentary Assembly of the African, Caribbean and Pacific Group of States, my Special Representative engaged with government stakeholders regarding preparations for the 2019 legislative elections and ongoing political reforms in Benin.

Sustaining peace

42. From 11 to 13 July, my Special Representative undertook a joint mission to the Gambia with the President of the ECOWAS Commission, Jean-Claude Brou. Discussions focused on the follow-up to the international conference on the national development plan of 22 May, internal political dynamics, security sector reform, transitional justice, statelessness of refugee children and land governance.

43. From 15 to 19 October, my Special Representative undertook a joint mission with the Chair of the Peacebuilding Commission, Ion Jinga, and my Assistant Secretary-General for Peacebuilding Support, Oscar Fernandez-Taranco, to Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire and the Gambia. One theme common to all three countries was the importance of overcoming challenges to national reconciliation.

44. In Burkina Faso, interlocutors highlighted popular expectations and frustrations arising from economic decline, as well as the fragile security situation in the country. The President of the Haut Conseil pour la réconciliation et l'unité nationale, Bazomboue Leandre Bassole, emphasized the need to re-establish confidence between the population and the authorities.

45. In Côte d'Ivoire, the joint mission encouraged the Government to develop a new request for eligibility for funds from the Peacebuilding Fund for 2020.

46. In the Gambia, the joint mission participated in the launch of the Truth, Reconciliation and Reparations Commission. During meetings with the President and other government authorities, the United Nations delegation appealed for the Commission to adopt a victim-centred approach, with special attention to women, children and vulnerable groups, and to ensure the protection of victims and witnesses.

B. Cameroon-Nigeria Mixed Commission

47. Insecurity, including mounting tensions in the English-speaking regions of Cameroon, continued to impede demarcation field operations along the Cameroon-Nigeria land boundary, thus slowing down pillar emplacement. The parties to the Cameroon-Nigeria Mixed Commission met in Lagos on 3 and 4 October to finalize logistical planning for the resumption of pillar construction. Field operations recommenced in early November for the construction of 335 pillars.

48. My Special Representative, who also serves as Chair of the Mixed Commission, continued to engage the heads of the Nigerian and Cameroonian delegations in bilateral consultations towards a resolution of outstanding areas of disagreement. A mediation team was dispatched to Abuja in July and to Yaoundé in August to follow up on the exchange of memorandums between the parties. Overall, the parties reaffirmed their commitment to implementing the judgment of the International Court of Justice of October 2002 and to fully demarcating the land and maritime boundaries shared by the two countries.

C. Enhancing subregional capacities to address cross-border and cross-cutting threats to peace and security

49. During the reporting period, UNOWAS continued to reinforce its collaboration with regional partners, the African Union, the United Nations Regional Office for Central Africa (UNOCA) and United Nations country teams in the region. That included the deployment of technical missions to Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire, the Gambia, Guinea and the Niger. In addition, UNOWAS continued to work closely with the Peacebuilding Support Office, with a focus on political dialogue to prevent electoral-related violence, increasing the role of women in political processes and confidence-building between local populations and the authorities. On the basis of joint consultations with UNOWAS, the Peacebuilding Fund committed $12 million for cross-border projects across the Sahel region under the framework of the United Nations integrated strategy for the Sahel.

50. UNOWAS deployed two technical support missions to assist in the preparation of the first joint summit of ECCAS and ECOWAS on the theme "Peace, security, stability, the fight against terrorism and violent extremism", held in Lomé on 30 July. At the meeting, attended by my Special Representatives for Central Africa and for West Africa and the Sahel, the leaders of the two regions reaffirmed their commitment to enhancing cooperation to address common challenges, including terrorism and violent extremism, maritime insecurity and piracy, pastoralism-related conflict and organized crime. They also agreed to hold statutory meetings every two years.

51. From 5 to 6 September, UNOWAS hosted the annual ECOWAS-UNOWAS desk-to-desk meeting in Dakar to review ongoing political and security trends in the subregion and to plan joint initiatives for 2018 and 2019.

52. On 3 October, UNOWAS representatives met in Dakar with the Deputy Secretary-General of the Mano River Union in charge of peace and security to discuss the UNOWAS-Mano River Union strategic cooperation framework; the operationalization of the Mano River Union cross-border security strategy; capacity-building on human rights for the secretariat of the Mano River Union; and capacity-building on gender, peace and security for the Mano River Women's Peace Network.

53. On 25 October, my Special Representative participated in the ninth high-level retreat of the African Union on the promotion of peace, security and stability in Africa, which was held in Ghana.

54. On 3 December, UNOWAS hosted the biannual meeting of the heads of United Nations peace missions in West Africa and the Sahel, with the participation of my Special Representative for Central Africa and the United Nations Resident Coordinators for Côte d'Ivoire and Liberia. Participants exchanged views on the peace and security dynamics in their respective areas of responsibility. They also agreed to continue cooperation and to strengthen information-sharing on key issues affecting the subregion.

55. In December, UNOWAS completed the first stage of an analysis of climate-related security risks in West Africa and the Sahel, their impact on populations and options for addressing them from a conflict-prevention perspective. The activity was conducted in line with the statement by the Presidential of the Security Council of 10 August 2018 (S/PRST/2018/16), in which the Security Council recognized the adverse effects of climate change, ecological changes and natural disasters on the stability of West Africa and the Sahel and stressed the need for long-term strategies by Governments and the United Nations to support stabilization and build resilience.

56. From 10 to 12 December, in Ouagadougou, UNOWAS and ECOWAS, in cooperation with the Government of Burkina Faso, held the first annual youth forum

for peace and security in West Africa and the Sahel. The forum discussed activities by youth organizations in the region in view of the implementation of Security Council resolutions 2250 (2015) and 2419 (2018) on youth, peace and security.

57. During the reporting period, UNOWAS participated in assessment missions of the Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate (CTED) to Burkina Faso, Mali and the Niger. The visits were aimed at assessing the needs and capacities of Member States with respect to the implementation of Security Council resolutions 1373 (2001), 1624 (2005), 2178 (2014) and 2242 (2015). The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) also provided technical assistance to officials from the Ministries of Justice, along with magistrates and lawyers in the region, on international standards and best practice in the prosecution and investigation of terrorism cases.

Security sector reform

58. UNOWAS continued to support security sector reform processes in the region. In Burkina Faso, the United Nations security sector reform advisory team assisted the Government in directing the security sector reform process and addressing growing security threats. The advisory team supported the Government in implementing confidence-building measures between the population and security forces. In addition, it advised the Haut Conseil pour la réconciliation et l'unité nationale on the role of security institutions in the national reconciliation process. At the request of the Government, the advisory team, with support from the United Nations Mine Action Service, is helping to assess the security sector's preparedness to address the threats posed by improvised explosive devices.

59. In Guinea, security sector reform support focused on the elaboration of national policies and capacity-building efforts for the police. The security sector reform advisory team continued to support the establishment of gender-responsive security services in nine security institutions.

60. In the Gambia, the United Nations security sector reform advisory team supported the Government in establishing the office of the national security adviser and the technical committee on security sector reform. It also supported the ongoing nationally-led process to develop a national security policy. In addition, the advisory team supported the establishment of a gender focal point network to enhance national capacity to implement gender-responsive initiatives in the security sector.

61. The above-mentioned activities were facilitated by resources from the Peacebuilding Fund.

Conflicts between herders and farmers

62. On 16 October, UNOWAS launched a study on pastoralism and security in West Africa and the Sahel, which focused on the causes of conflict between herders and farmers in the region. The study was based on close consultations with the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations and other United Nations entities in the region, the ECOWAS Commission, the Permanent Inter-State Committee on Drought Control in the Sahel, the World Bank, the United States Agency for International Development and independent experts. Following its publication, UNOWAS has been working closely with United Nations entities, ECOWAS and other partners to operationalize key recommendations, including the development of conflict prevention and resolution mechanisms to address competition over access to scarce water and land. ECOWAS and UNOWAS held several meetings in Abuja, from 19 to 22 November, to develop a joint workplan on transhumance, conflict analysis and the link between climate change and conflict.

The Lake Chad basin

63. During the reporting period, progress was made in the implementation of Security Council resolution 2349 (2017) to support a regional response to the crisis in the Lake Chad basin. On 30 August, Nigeria hosted a ministerial council meeting of the Lake Chad Basin Commission, at which a regional strategy was adopted to promote the stabilization, recovery and resilience of Boko Haram-affected areas of the Lake Chad basin. The meeting took place before a high-level conference on the Lake Chad region, which was held on 3 and 4 September in Berlin, and served as a platform to mobilize additional resources for the stabilization and sustainable development agenda for the subregion. My Deputy Special Representative for West Africa and the Sahel attended the conference and highlighted the importance of gender as an entry point to addressing the root causes of the crisis. During the conference, partners pledged over $2 billion to help meet the needs of the more than 17 million people affected by the crisis.

64. In support of the strategy, UNOWAS and UNOCA have been engaged in a series of consultations with Benin, Cameroon, Chad, the Niger and Nigeria as follow up to the Lake Chad Basin Governors' Forum, which was held on 8 and 9 May in Maiduguri, Nigeria. In the same vein, UNODC and CTED, with the participation of the Lake Chad Basin Commission and the African Union, held workshops in Niamey and Yaoundé on the role of screening and prosecution of persons associated with Boko Haram.

Piracy in the Gulf of Guinea

65. During the reporting period, international support to combat maritime crime and piracy focused on bolstering the operational capacity of maritime agencies to patrol their waters and strengthening the capacity of the criminal justice chain to detect, investigate and prosecute cases of piracy and maritime crime. UNODC supported the Liberian Coast Guard in enhancing its capacity to perform regular maintenance, through the secondment of a maritime engineer and the provision of spare parts and radio equipment. Similar support was provided in Sierra Leone.

Drug trafficking and transnational organized crime

66. My Special Representative continued to mobilize support to combat drug trafficking and transnational organized crime in close cooperation with United Nations agencies, regional partners and Governments in the region. During the reporting period, security sector stakeholders in the region benefitted from a series of training sessions organized by the United Nations, the International Criminal Police Organization (INTERPOL) and bilateral partners. This included training and mentoring sponsored by France on topics relating to security for the Civil Aviation Agency in the Niger, to passenger targeting for the joint airport interdiction task force in Burkina Faso, and to narcotics trafficking for the joint airport interdiction task force in Mali. In August 2018, ECOWAS and UNODC held a regional workshop in Abuja on strategies to address the illicit trafficking of tramadol and other prescription medicines, with joint airport interdiction task forces from Burkina Faso, the Niger and Nigeria. From 17 September to 8 October, joint airport interdiction task forces in West Africa took part in the INTERPOL-led "Lionfish" global joint operation, which led to the seizure of more than 55 tons of narcotics worldwide.

D. Implementation of the United Nations integrated strategy for the Sahel

67. During the reporting period, UNOWAS worked in close consultation with my Special Adviser for the Sahel to ensure greater integration of national and regional perspectives into the conceptual and operational frameworks for United Nations engagement in the Sahel. That has included regular consultations with ECOWAS, the African Union, the Group of Five for the Sahel (G-5 Sahel) and other regional organizations working in the Sahel, in close collaboration with other United Nations entities. A series of coordination meetings, under the framework of the United Nations integrated strategy for the Sahel, contributed to facilitating the development of joint initiatives with regional partners.

68. On 17 and 18 September in Abuja, my Special Representative, in conjunction with ECOWAS and the African Union Mission for Mali and the Sahel, chaired a meeting of regional organizations operating in the Sahel, including the West African Economic and Monetary Union, the Lake Chad Basin Commission, the G-5 Sahel and the Liptako-Gourma Integrated Development Authority. Participants called for increased mobilization of resources from the private sector and diaspora, noting that most of the pledges made at recent donor conferences had not materialized.

69. On 12 October in Niamey, UNOWAS and the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women), in partnership with the African Union and the secretariat of the G-5 Sahel, supported and facilitated the official launch of the "G-5 Sahel Women's Platform". The meeting was chaired by the Prime Minister of the Niger, Brigi Rafini. Participants included the Permanent Secretary of the G-5 Sahel, Ministers for Gender and Women's Affairs of the G-5 Sahel countries, government officials and civil society organizations, as well as regional and international partners. The meeting adopted a road map for the implementation of the activities of the platform.

70. On 13 October, my Special Adviser for the Sahel organized a high-level meeting on the Sahel, in the margins of a World Bank-IMF meeting in Bali, Indonesia. It was organized in partnership with the World Bank, the G-5 Sahel and the Alliance for the Sahel and was attended by Ministers of Finance from the 10 countries that are under the framework of the United Nations integrated strategy for the Sahel, as well as Ministers of Finance of the Group of 20. The meeting was part of ongoing advocacy efforts to mobilize resources for transformative initiatives for the Sahel on climate-resilient agriculture and renewable energy, which have been developed in partnership with the United Nations Sustainable Development Group. My Special Adviser continued to reinforce partnerships with Governments, regional organizations, financial institutions, the private sector and civil society to implement priority areas of the United Nations support plan for the Sahel, to strengthen synergies and to mobilize resources.

71. On 22 and 23 October, my Special Representative and my Special Adviser attended an informal meeting of Special Envoys and partners working in the Sahel that was hosted by Denmark to reinforce a collective response to the deteriorating situation in the Sahel, including through the G-5 Sahel priority investment plan and the Alliance for the Sahel. Discussions focused on the peace process in Mali and on the full operationalization of the G-5 Sahel Joint Force.

72. On 2 November in Dakar, my Special Representative chaired the seventh meeting of the steering committee for the United Nations integrated strategy for the Sahel. The meeting brought together my Special Adviser for the Sahel, regional directors, Resident Coordinators and the Department of Political Affairs of the United Nations Secretariat to discuss current peace, development and security trends in the

region. Meeting participants reviewed progress made in the implementation of the United Nations support plan and discussed coordination efforts, along with the mobilization strategy for the Sahel, as well as support for the implementation of other regional plans, including the G-5 Sahel priority investment plan.

73. On 12 November, the Peacebuilding Commission held its annual session, on the theme, "Peacebuilding and sustaining peace in the Sahel region". The meeting provided an opportunity for the United Nations Secretariat, Member States and partners working on issues in the Sahel region to review progress made in supporting the countries in the region and to reflect on the implementation of the United Nations support plan for the Sahel. The Deputy Secretary-General opened the event. The meeting came on the heels of a high-level event on Mali and the Sahel, held on 26 September, in the margins of the general debate of the seventy-third session of the General Assembly. Together with the President of Mali, the Chairperson of the African Union Commission and other partners of the Sahel, I opened the high-level event by calling upon all parties in Mali to honour their commitments and stressing that stability in Mali is a prerequisite for peace and development in the broader Sahel.

74. UNOWAS, in partnership with other United Nations entities, supported the organization of an international donor conference to raise funds for the G-5 Sahel donors' roundtable on the priority investment plan, which took place in Nouakchott on 6 December. The conference concluded with pledges of over $2 billion to finance the priority investment plan, as well as an agreement among partners and the countries of the G-5 Sahel to establish a follow-up mechanism to ensure the timely disbursal of funds.

75. Through its liaison office in Nouakchott, UNOWAS and the Department of Political Affairs of the United Nations Secretariat provided support for the establishment of a G-5 Sahel threat analysis and early warning centre through the deployment of a security analyst and a human rights/governance analyst to the secretariat of the G-5 Sahel. UNOWAS, the United Nations Office of Counter-Terrorism and the United States Agency for International Development continued to support the regional cell of the G-5 Sahel for the prevention of radicalization and violent extremism. UNOWAS also facilitated the participation of members of the regional cell in several workshops with a view to developing a shared framework for analysis and building capacity with respect to the prevention of violent extremism.

76. As part of its integrated assistance on countering terrorism in the Sahel, the United Nations Office of Counter-Terrorism organized, in conjunction with the secretariat of the G-5 Sahel, a workshop in Nouakchott from 4 to 6 September to build the capacity of G-5 Sahel security forces to prevent and manage kidnapping for ransom situations. From 6 to 8 November, the Office of Counter-Terrorism also organized, in partnership with the secretariat of the G-5 Sahel, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization and UNOWAS, a workshop for youth groups, women's groups and other civil society organizations of G-5 Sahel countries on the role of education in the prevention of violent extremism. The Office of Counter-Terrorism and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) continued to implement a project on ensuring compliance with human rights standards at borders in the context of counter-terrorism for G-5 Sahel countries.

E. Promotion of good governance, respect for the rule of law, human rights and gender mainstreaming

77. UNOWAS, OHCHR, UNDP, UNODC, the United Nations Children's Fund, the office of my Special Representative on Sexual Violence in Conflict and UN-Women,

in collaboration with the African Union, ECOWAS, the secretariat of the G-5 Sahel and the Government of the Niger organized the second regional conference on impunity, access to justice and human rights in West Africa and the Sahel. Held from 10 to 12 September in the Niger, the conference brought together high-level officials from countries of the region. Participants adopted a declaration with recommendations on enhancing judicial cooperation and the administration of justice, in particular in the fight against violent extremism and transnational organized crime, on addressing conflict-related sexual violence, and on the role of transitional justice mechanisms in promoting national reconciliation. A ministerial platform was created to track the implementation of recommendations. UNOWAS is currently working with regional partners to identify sources of funding for the platform.

78. UNOWAS continued to provide support to civil society organizations working on human rights and rule of law issues. On 21 October, it held a panel discussion on access to justice, impunity and corruption during the meetings of non-governmental organizations that preceded the sixty-third ordinary session of the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights, held in Banjul.

79. On 7 and 8 July, the Deputy Secretary-General conducted a joint high-level visit with representatives of the Government of Sweden and the African Union to Chad, the Niger and South Sudan to address issues relating to women, peace, security and development. The mission served as an opportunity to advocate for empowering women and girls in the Sahel, ensuring their participation in political and peace processes, and ending violence against them. On 10 July, the Deputy Secretary-General briefed the Security Council at a meeting on women, peace and security in the Sahel, during which she highlighted the need to increase support to the region, with a focus on transformative, scaled-up and integrated projects. On 3 and 4 October, UNOWAS representatives attended an ECOWAS workshop on gender inclusivity and effective mediation processes in West Africa with a view to elaborating a framework to be adopted by ECOWAS on gender and mediation.

80. UNOWAS continued to coordinate the Working Group on Women, Youth, Peace and Security in West Africa and the Sahel. UNOWAS facilitated two subregional exchange sessions on the theme "Representativeness of women in the media", on 30 August, and on the theme "The demographic dividend in West and Central Africa", on 18 October. From 17 to 22 September, UNOWAS led a mission to Togo to hold the annual meeting of the Working Group. The meeting was attended by more than 100 women and youth representatives from 12 countries of the region, who agreed on a joint road map of activities for the next year.

81. On 26 November, in Praia, my Special Representative, together with the President Jorge Carlos Fonseca of Cabo Verde, co-chaired the ninth edition of the regional open day on Security Council resolution 1325 (2000) and subsequent resolutions on women, youth, peace and security. Participants identified policy approaches to ensure greater involvement of women and youth in decision-making processes.

IV. Observations and recommendations

82. While there were several positive developments in West Africa and the Sahel during the reporting period, increased insecurity and political instability affected a number of countries in the region.

83. There has been incremental improvement in the conduct of elections in the region. However, the pre- and post-electoral periods have often been characterized by antagonistic contestations and disputes. I call upon authorities and national

stakeholders to work together to ensure a level playing field and to create an environment conducive to the holding of peaceful, inclusive and credible elections in 2019 in Benin, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Mauritania, Nigeria and Senegal.

84. Several countries of the Mano River basin made progress in strengthening democracy, notably through the peaceful alternation of power in Liberia and Sierra Leone and the holding of local elections in Côte d'Ivoire. Nonetheless, there is a continuing need to consolidate these hard-won but still fragile gains. In that regard, I encourage international partners to prioritize support for the Governments and peoples of Côte d'Ivoire, Guinea, Liberia and Sierra Leone, as well as the secretariat of the Mano River Union, to help to consolidate peace in the Mano River basin.

85. The authorities in the Gambia are to be commended for progress made in the operationalization of its reconciliation commission. I encourage the authorities in countries throughout the region to further prioritize reconciliation as an integral part of building responsive State institutions and addressing grievances.

86. While progress had been recorded in the fight against impunity, reports of infringements of human rights, including the instrumentalization of the judicial system for political purposes and the suppression of freedom of expression, remain a source of concern. It is essential that the Governments of the region respect the independence of the judiciary, ensure equitable access to justice for all and the protection of human rights defenders, and advance security sector reform along with the adoption of legislative frameworks to address sexual and gender-based violence.

87. The continued under-representation of women in senior government positions in West Africa and the Sahel is a matter of concern. I urge Governments in the region to redouble their efforts to implement existing measures or, in their absence, to adopt new ones, in accordance with national and regional commitments, to enhance the empowerment and political inclusion of women in decision-making and leadership roles, and to promote inclusive, gender-responsive development.

88. The countries of the Sahel have undertaken notable efforts to address security challenges, in particular through the operationalization of the Multinational Joint Task Force and the G-5 Sahel Joint Force. More support is needed in this challenging task, including the establishment of predictable and sustainable funding mechanisms for those forces.

89. The growing use of military responses to the challenges facing West Africa and the Sahel is disquieting. Military solutions, while necessary, are not sufficient. A holistic approach is required to address violent extremism, with an emphasis on good governance, dialogue and mediation, sustainable development, including through the provision of basic services, and the inclusion of all segments of society, in particular women and youth, in political and peace processes.

90. I am deeply concerned by the growing sophistication in the organizational capacities and reach of violent extremist groups in parts of the Sahel and Lake Chad basin. The rising number of attacks in Burkina Faso, Mali, the Niger and Nigeria demonstrate the potential of such groups to strike across the region, destroy the social fabric of communities and deprive populations of their most basic rights. I call upon Member States to intensify their efforts to address the root causes of the phenomenon in order to reverse that trend.

91. Allegations of human rights violations by security forces across the region are a cause for concern. Counter-insurgency efforts and security operations must be carried out in full compliance with international humanitarian, human rights and refugee laws.

92. The lack of humanitarian access, notably in the Lake Chad basin, as well as in the Liptako-Gourma region, is resulting in unnecessary human suffering. The parties concerned must respect the humanitarian principles of impartiality and neutrality and allow the unhindered delivery of humanitarian assistance to populations in need, especially children, the elderly and other vulnerable groups.

93. The humanitarian response plan for the Lake Chad basin for 2019 is critically under-funded. I encourage international partners to contribute generously to the plan to help address the needs of the most vulnerable.

94. The impact of climate change on conflict dynamics in the Lake Chad basin and parts of the Sahel is serious. An adequate response will require national, regional and international partners to develop a regional framework, in line with the United Nations support plan for the Sahel, to proactively respond to the current and projected threats posed by climate change.

95. The recent adoption of a regional stabilization strategy for countries affected by the Boko Haram crisis and the support of the international community in that regard is an encouraging development. I call upon partners to ensure a rapid response and that all engagements are adapted to specific contexts in close collaboration with the affected Governments.

96. The Governments of Cameroon and Nigeria have commendably committed to completing the demarcation of their shared land and maritime boundaries. I encourage them to renew efforts to resolve any residual differences with respect to the judgment of the International Court of Justice of 10 October 2002, with a view to accelerating the completion of the mandate of the Cameroon-Nigeria Mixed Commission.

97. I commend the efforts of the United Nations system based in Dakar and my Special Adviser for the Sahel, Ibrahim Thiaw, towards fostering the implementation of the United Nations support plan for the Sahel. It will be important for the United Nations and external partners to continue to work closely with Member States and regional organizations to accelerate progress in that regard.

98. The current mandate of UNOWAS will end on 31 December 2019, while my reform proposals, as approved by the General Assembly, will enter into force on 1 January 2019. Meanwhile, since the merger of the Office of the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for the Sahel and the United Nations Office for West Africa into UNOWAS in January 2016, there have been significant political and institutional changes in the region. Therefore, the Secretariat will undertake a strategic review of UNOWAS in 2019, with a view to enhancing the Mission's capacity to carry out its mandate.

99. I wish to express my appreciation to the Governments of West Africa and the Sahel region, the African Union, ECOWAS, the G-5 Sahel, the Mano River Union, the Gulf of Guinea Commission and the Lake Chad Basin Commission for their continued cooperation with UNOWAS. I also extend my appreciation to the United Nations system in West Africa and the Sahel, civil society organizations and other institutions for their close partnership with UNOWAS. I commend and further encourage the close collaboration between UNOCA and UNOWAS on an increasing range of topical and transversal challenges, which reflects and responds proactively to the enhanced cooperation between ECCAS and ECOWAS. I would like to express particular appreciation to my Special Representative, as well as the staff of UNOWAS and the Cameroon-Nigeria Mixed Commission, for their continuing efforts to advance peace and security in West Africa and the Sahel.